

small parties of half a dozen. Its flight is very rapid and straight, and the cry is clear and sharp and often repeated, especially when on the wing. It feeds principally on berries and wild fruit, and I have noticed that it drinks regularly, usually about noon.

The soft parts are :—Irides pale yellow ; bill, upper mandible blackish, lower pearly ; legs and toes slaty.]

[To be continued.]

XXIX.—*On the Birds noticed during a Voyage to Alexandria.*

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IN the spring of 1909 I went by a slow passenger-steamer to Alexandria. As there are not a great number of papers dealing with bird-life seen at sea and in the neighbourhood of the ports of call, I think that it may be worth while to put on record the names of such species as I came across, especially as I was on the look out the whole time, and kept careful notes of those that I met with. Short calls of a few hours were made at Gibraltar, Algiers, and Malta, and nearly all the time available at these places was devoted to studying the bird-life of the neighbourhood.

I left Liverpool on April the 13th, 1909, in the s.s. 'Menes.' In the Mersey were noted Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Herring-Gulls, both adult and immature, and some Common Gulls. The next day, as we went down the Welsh coast, Herring-Gulls, Lesser Black-backed Gulls, and Kittiwakes followed the ship the whole day, and these were almost all adult birds ; two adult Gannets were also seen. At dusk about a dozen Manx Shearwaters appeared from the west flying in towards land. Had these birds come from the Irish coast, or had they been resting on the sea during the day ? On the 15th, we were out of sight of land after leaving the Scilly Islands at 3 A.M., and birds were scarce ; a few adult and immature Great Black-backed Gulls (*Larus marinus*) and Puffins were all that were seen, except a large Skua in the

distance. We were then over one hundred miles from land. The next day, passing through the Bay, we saw only one or two Gannets and some immature Gulls. On the 17th we were running down the Portuguese coast with land never more than fifty miles distant, and Gulls were more numerous; several adult and immature Lesser Black-backs and some adult Yellow-legged Herring-Gulls followed the boat all day. The latter birds were easily identifiable, as when they sailed close over head their yellow legs were conspicuous: an immature Gannet was the only other species seen.

The next day we passed close to Cape St. Vincent, and here a Hoopoe was brought to me which had settled on the ship exhausted. It had nothing in its gizzard and the ovary was slightly enlarged, so the bird must have flown a considerable distance to be so exhausted as not to be able to reach land, only two miles distant; moreover, the weather was calm. Two other birds, which I did not see, settled on the ship during the day, and soon flew to the north, so that even if they had come from the nearest point on the African coast a hundred and fifty to two hundred miles distant, and their point of exit may have been much further off, they were performing a long sea journey instead of crossing the Straits. But it may be that their objectives were the river valleys of the Guadiana and Guadalquivir, up which, perhaps, there are big migration-routes. These records may seem little to base any theory on, but it must be remembered that at sea, as on land, for every bird one observes migrating there are probably hundreds of others on the same course which are not met with. The only other birds seen this day were an immature Great Black-backed Gull and an adult *Puffinus kuhli*.

On the 19th of April we were at Gibraltar, and having all the morning ashore, I started early and walked to the Carboneros hills at the head of the bay near Campamento. The character of the ground here has altered much since Col. Irby's time, and, as all the cork-woods have gone, many birds have gone with them. Round the foot of the hills is a sandy waste covered with coarse grass, and dotted about here and

there are small houses and gardens, but very few trees. Here I saw a few Redstarts, Common Wheatears, Wood-Chats, Garden-Warblers, and Crested Larks, while Swallows, House-Martins, and Swifts were numerous. The Sparrow of Gibraltar appeared to be *P. domesticus*. Further up the hillside the ground became broken with big boulders and plentifully covered by gorse and heather, which in places was high. Bird-life was not abundant, but the two commonest species were the Sardinian Warbler (*Sylvia melanocephala*) and the Spectacled Warbler (*Sylvia conspiciellata*). Both these birds have pretty warbling songs, and the former in its habits much resembles the Common White-throat, as it mounts up into the air and hovers, singing the while; it also has a loud scolding note. Both these species were evidently breeding, and were feeding their young on beetles and other insects. Equally common was the Stonechat (*Pratincola rubicola*), which was also nesting. Compared with our British Stonechat at the same time of year, this bird has much of the grey edgings to the feathers of its back worn off, so that the upper parts look almost black while the under parts are noticeably paler. I saw one or two pairs of Black-throated Chats (*Saxicola occidentalis* of Salvadori), but judging from their organs they were not breeding; a male had all the body-feathers quite fresh, and had evidently not long moulted, while the tail also looked quite new. Other birds which were numerous were Kestrels, Spanish Ravens, and Goldfinches. There were also some Nightingales which evidently had just arrived; they were very shy, skulking, and silent. I witnessed an interesting arrival of Bee-eaters; they came in high up from over the Straits and went on inland to the north, uttering their well-known call-note. Another bird which I saw arrive from Africa was the Eared Chat (*Saxicola caterinæ* of Whitaker). I saw it first as a speck high up over Gibraltar: it gradually came nearer, and finally pitched close to me on a rock; the testes were fairly enlarged and there were the remains of beetles in its gizzard. As regards Vultures, I saw several *Neophron percnopterus*, both

adults and young; one was feeding on a carcass in the village of Linnea: Griffon Vultures I also saw, the square tail and extended primaries being very noticeable; on one occasion there were five wheeling round together. In Gibraltar Harbour there were adult *Larus fuscus* and *L. cachinnans*, many immature *L. ridibundus* and *L. melanocephalus*, while I saw one adult of the latter species in full winter plumage and one immature bird with a partial hood. As we left Gibraltar flock after flock of Puffins were steadily passing west through the Straits, evidently a migratory movement, and during the afternoon scattered parties of Swallows kept crossing from the African coast.

On April the 20th, in fine weather, with a light N.E. wind, some Swallows passed the ship, going N. by E.,—we were then seventy miles from the African shore and thirty from Capo de Gata; more passed during the day: the only other birds seen were a few Puffins. On the 21st we put into Algiers, and were about seven hours ashore. Not knowing where to go, I struck out to the country on the west of the town. Here were many gardens and scattered houses, and, further on, village after village with little or no open land except gardens. Swallows, House-Martins, and Nightingales were plentiful; the last in full song. Many other birds were seen, including the following species probably on migration:—Common Redstart, Pied Flycatcher, Blackcap, Willow Wren, Garden Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Wryneck, Blue-headed Wagtail. The Algerian Chaffinch was singing; I could not be certain of any difference in song between it and our bird, but the alarm-note seemed quite distinctly weaker and less metallic than that of our bird. The Wagtail was typical *Motacilla flava*; the Linnets looked markedly paler, but the Blue Tits very brilliant and with a dark crown. To any one visiting Algiers, the walk that I took could not be bettered for seeing some of the common birds in a short time, but there are too many people and gardens for collecting.

The next day we skirted along the African coast, which was about six or eight miles distant, but a few adult Gulls (*Larus*

cachinnans) were the only birds seen. On the 23rd we were off the Bay of Tunis, and during the day I saw an immature Gannet and some young *Larus marinus* and adult *L. cachinnans*. Some small Shearwaters, probably *Puffinus yelkouanus*, were observed about ten miles N.W. of Pantellaria, and in the evening a few Swallows came on board. The following morning we were in Malta, and on visiting the market I found a few birds exposed for sale. Turtle-Doves, Quails, and Golden Orioles (mostly fully adult birds, but some immature) were the most numerous, but there were also a Scops Owl, Cuckoo, Hoopoe, Rock-Thrush (*Monticola saxatilis*), Red-footed Falcon, a Roller, a Short-eared Owl, and a Reeve—a truly mixed bag—which could be bought for threepence a head. Having a few hours to spare, I took a cab to the Marsa and walked up a very rocky valley, on the side of which were innumerable small patches of cultivation surrounded by low stone walls, known as the Wied Zubbug. Even here, the only place near Valetta where one can get away from houses and people, I found bird-life not abundant; but I noted the following birds:—Swallows, House-Martins, Spotted and Pied Flycatchers, Golden Orioles, a Wood-Chat, Turtle-Doves, Spectacled Warblers, Rock-Thrushes, Red-footed Falcons, and the Maltese Sparrow. All the birds were very wild, no doubt owing to native persecution. The Rock-Thrushes were in full song; the song seemed to me rather sweet and soft, more melodious and less monotonous than that of the Song-Thrush and having more “body” than that of a Common Wheatear. The Spectacled Warbler was also uttering a rather pleasing little song, in parts rather like a Common Wren’s, but more warbling and varied and not so shrill. I found the nest of this bird where the straggling branches of a crab-tree mingled with those of a hawthorn. It seemed rather big for the size of the bird, and was composed of the dried leaves of some kind of thistle lined with dried grasses, while dotted about in the lining were the tops of a flowering grass which looked like yellowish wool and reminded me of the little bits of wool frequently seen dotted about in the nest of the Common Whitethroat;

I wondered for what purpose these two allied species thus "decorate" their nests. This nest was ready for eggs. The Maltese Sparrow (*Passer domesticus melitensis*) I saw only round houses, and even there it seemed wild, but I remarked that the striping on the flanks was very noticeable. In Floriana long earthenware bottles, with the bottoms knocked out, are put up under the eaves for these birds to nest in.

On the morning of the 25th, when a hundred and eighty-three miles from Malta and from the African coast, we had Turtle-Doves passing across our bows every half-hour or so in twos and threes. None settled, and only one circled round the boat until joined by two or three others, and then went, as did all the others, N. by E. In the afternoon a Blue-head Wagtail came on board, and remained with us until we were off Alexandria—an assisted passage of seven hundred and fifty miles. Later a Meadow-Pipit and some Swallows alighted; the latter went to roost in the saloon.

On skinning the birds I had bought in the Malta market, I found that the Scops Owl had the remains of a lizard and some beetles in the gizzard and that the ovary was not enlarged appreciably; the ovary of the Rock-Thrush was in the same state and the gizzard held the remains of beetles and snails. The Roller had the remains of beetles in its gizzard, the testes slightly enlarged; the Red-footed Falcon had the ovary not enlarged and remains of beetles in the gizzard; the Golden Orioles had the organs slightly enlarged, and some had the remains of green and hairy caterpillars in their gizzards. The last-mentioned birds were fairly fat, the colour of the fat being bright golden. The colour of fat in birds varies somewhat, and perhaps has some correlation with the colour of the plumage. I have once or twice noted that some birds with bright red in the soft parts (*e. g.* adult Oyster-catchers) have the fat distinctly tinged with red.

The next day we were skirting along about sixty miles from the African coast, but the only birds seen were a Swallow and some Mediterranean Shearwaters; these latter were going about in parties of five or six, and their typical flight was well seen. They seemed to fly in segments of large circles and

were at their greatest height above the water at the end of the segment: then, with slanting wings, they went down to the surface and so started another flight; when feeding they suddenly put up their wings and dived straight in; then they came up and rested on the surface a moment before resuming their flight.

On the return journey we left Alexandria on May the 19th, but saw no birds till the 21st. When in long. $20^{\circ} 45'$ and a hundred miles from the African coast, two Red-footed Falcons came on board and roosted in the rigging.

On the 23rd we put into Malta for an hour or so, but the only birds in the market were a few Turtle-Doves and a cageful of Short-toed Larks; the coloration of the latter birds varied enormously and no two seemed quite alike, especially about the head. In the harbour were a few *Larus cachinnans*. Off Gozo quite a number of Storm-Petrels followed the wake of the ship and came with us all day—that is, they presumably flew a hundred and twenty miles from their nesting-places. In the evening, when about forty miles equidistant from Pantellaria and the Sicilian coast, some House-Martins came on board and roosted. Some more came on board the next evening. The only other birds seen on the voyage to Gibraltar were a few *Larus cachinnans* and small Shearwaters. Just before we got opposite Gibraltar on the 27th, a Willow-Warbler came on board and, after remaining a few minutes, flew to land east of Gibraltar, making an unnecessarily long journey, as we thought. In the Straits some Puffins were still to be seen, and over the Rock, flying in a wedge-formation to the westward, was a flock of about a hundred and fifty Flamingoes, probably on their way to the Guadalquivir. On the 28th, when off Lisbon, I saw some immature Gannets, and a few more in the Bay of Biscay. Otherwise birds were few until we neared the French coast off Ushant and the Channel, when Kittiwakes, Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, adult and immature, and immature Gannets were met with, and off the Scilly Islands Puffins were seen; off Holy Isle, in addition to the Gulls were Common Terns, Guillemots, Manx Shearwaters, and a Black Tern.